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THE LIVING ISSUES OF GERMAN POSTWAR PHILOSOPHY (1940)

Introductory remark

Both the intellectual glory and the political misery of the Germans may be traced back to one and the same cause: German civilisation is considerably *younger* than the civilisation of the West. The Germans are, strictly speaking, less civilized than the English and the French, i.e., they are to a lesser degree citizens, *free* citizens. This is one aspect of the matter. The other aspect is that German philosophy is more apt to take a critical attitude towards civilisation, towards the *tradition* of civilisations, than Western philosophy is.[2] We may go so far as to say that,[1] generally speaking,[1] German philosophy *implies* a more or less radical criticism of the very idea of civilisation and especially of modern civilisation – a criticism disastrous in the political field, but necessary in the philosophical, in the theoretical field. For if civilisation is distinguished from, and even opposed to, what was formerly called the state of nature, the process of civilisation means an increasing going away from the *natural* condition of man, an increasing *forgetting* of that situation. And perhaps one must have a living knowledge, [3]an acute recollection[3] of that situation if one wants to know, i.e. to understand in its full meaning, the *natural*, the basic problems of philosophy.

Criticism of modern civilisation is related to a longing for some past, for some antiquity. An English acquaintance of mine told me that what struck him most, and what was most incomprehensible to him, when he was talking to Germans, was their longing for their tribal past. Now, longing for the

Teutonic past is only the most crude and unintelligent, the most ridiculous[4] form of a[5] deep dissatisfaction with modern civilisation. In its most enlightened form, it is a longing for classical antiquity, especially for Greek antiquity. In a famous aphorism, Nietzsche has described German thought as one great attempt to build a bridge leading back from the modern world to the world of Greece. One has only to recall the names of Leibniz, Lessing,[I] Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and Hegel to see that Nietzsche's remark is based on some evidence. This much is certain: Nietzsche's own philosophy, the most powerful single factor in German postwar philosophy, is almost identical with his criticism of modern civilisation in the name of classical antiquity.

The backbone of modern civilisation is modern *science.* German criticism of modern civilisation is therefore primarily criticism of modern science, either in the form of a limitation of its bearing or in a still more radical form. That criticism was expressed by the German philosophic movement of the end of the 18th and of the beginning of the 19th century, by the movement culminating in Hegel, in the form of the opposition of *history* as the realm of *freedom* vs. *nature* as the realm of (mathematical or mechanical) *necessity*, or of the opposition of organic growth or dialectical process vs. rational construction. This interpretation of the criticism of modern[6] civilisation naturally was an important factor in German postwar philosophy. But it was not *characteristic* of the latter. The slogan which expressed the attitude characteristic of postwar Germany towards modern civilisation, is, *not* history vs. unhistorical naturalism, or the grown vs. the made, *but* life or existence vs. science, science being *any* purely theoretical enterprise. The science criticized[7] in the name of life or existence, comprises both natural science and history.[II] The German postwar criticism is directed as much against Hegel and romanticism as

I "Kritik so verstanden, Gelehrsamkeit so betrieben, ist der Weg, auf dem Leibniz der geworden ist, der er ist, und der *einzige* Weg, auf dem ein denkender und fleissiger Mann sich ihm nähern kann." ["Critique understood in such a way, scholarship pursued in such a way, is the path on which Leibniz became the man he is and is the *sole* path on which a thinking and industrious man can approach him."]

II Nietzsche's 2. *Unzeitgemässe.*

against Descartes. The originator of that criticism was Nietzsche who had made it its principle to look at science from the point of view of art, and to look at art from the point of view of life. |

As is implied in what I have already said, German post- 1 verso
war philosophy is only to a certain extent postwar-philosophy. The large majority of the older generation and a considerable part of the younger generation naturally continued traditions which had been established in the 19th century or earlier without being disturbed by the upheaval of the war and of its aftermath. We may call this type of men the merely academic philosophers. Public opinion of postwar Germany was determined not by them, but by those men who were in contact with the revolution of thought – either as its exponents or as its originators –, by thinkers who felt that the traditions of the 19th century *could* not be continued and did not *deserve* to be continued. Of these thinkers one may distinguish two kinds: thinkers who had a direct and revolutionizing effect on the more open-minded and excitable part of the academic youth, and thinkers who in relative secrecy discovered, or rediscovered, a basis more in accordance with the nature of things than that underlying the preceding[8] period had been. For the purpose of a general discussion, I believe it to be better if I limit myself to a reasoned sketch of the more superficial movements which, however, were[9] influenced by, and influencing in their[10] turn, the deeper movement, that deeper movement being practically identical with the development of phenomenology. In doing this, I shall base myself not only and not even mainly on printed books or articles. Certain lectures and conversations and discussions which I remember, revealed to me the tendencies of the world in which I then was living, much better than the so-called final statements which I could read later on in print.

[1]One more word before I start: I speak of what *other people* thought – I do not necessarily approve of these thoughts – but my purpose is exclusively to give you sound information.[1]

The intellectual situation of Germany immediately after the war shows itself most clearly in two memorable publications: Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Max Weber's *Science and Learning as a Vocation.* The meaning of these publications

may be described as follows: Spengler's work was a most ruthless attack on the validity or the value of modern science and philosophy (and indeed of science and philosophy altogether), and Weber's public lecture was the most impressive defence, offered in postwar Germany, of modern science and philosophy.

I. Radical historicism and the impulse toward radical historical understanding, toward interpretation of texts

a) To appreciate the bearing of Spengler's teaching, one must remind oneself of the original claim of modern science and philosophy: they originally had[1] claimed to teach *the* truth, the truth valid for all men and indeed for all intelligent beings (Voltaire's *Micromégas*). That science and philosophy was declared by Spengler to be no more than the expression of a specific soul, of a specific *culture*, the Faustic culture –, and only one form of its self-expression, no less but no more significant than art, economy, strategy and what not. The claim of mathematic[s] and logic, e.g., to be absolutely true was dismissed: there is no logic or mathematic[s], but there are various logics and mathematics in accordance with the variety of cultures to which they belong. The same holds naturally true of ethics. Modern science or philosophy is no more *true* than, say, the[1] Chinese system of administration.

The only consequence which a theoretical man, a philosopher, could draw from this was that *the* task of philosophy is to understand the various cultures[11] as expressions of their souls. This would be certainly more philosophic than to elaborate still further modern logic, e.g., modern logic being nothing other than the expression of a specific soul. Spengler as it were replaced theory of knowledge or metaphysics by the understanding of the souls producing the various cultures, of these souls which are the *roots* of all "truth."|

2 recto The understanding of cultures naturally has a standard of *truth*. But it does not claim to be *absolutely* true. For whatever truth may be – it certainly must be meaningful. Now, historical studies are not meaningful for, they are not even understandable to, cultures other than the Faustic culture: historical

truth, the most radical truth, we might say: the only truth left, *exists* exclusively for Faustic man.

b) Prepared by the idealistic interpretation of science:

α) if reason does not *discover* the laws of nature, but if it is reason which *prescribes* [to] nature its laws, truth is the *product* of reason. Reason has its *history*. And that history is not necessarily determined by the exigencies of reason itself.

β) Science consists in organizing sense-data – but there are various ways of organizing sense-data – Newton and Goethe (Cassirer) – Simmel's various "planes."

c) Spengler seemed to represent the extreme of historicism; but it was soon seen[12] that he had not gone to the end of his way.

α) The philosophic deficiency of Spengler's teaching: it required as its basis an elaborate philosophy of man, of human existence as being essentially historical; a philosophy showing that man as *the* historical being is the origin of all meaning; and this presupposed an analysis of truth, an analysis showing that truth is essentially relative to human existence. Such a philosophy was elaborated by *Heidegger*.

β) Spengler had emphasized certain features common to *all* cultures: static (art, science, politics, religion) and dynamic (growth including decay) laws of culture, we may say. He had thus acknowledged the distinction between the essence of culture as such and the peculiar features of the individual culture, between unhistorical and historical elements of culture. But is it possible to make such a[1] distinction, as it is implied in the use of the very term "culture"? Is not "everything" historical? Is not the most abstract categorical system still historical, applicable to one culture only? More precisely: are the categories used by Spengler, really applicable to the phenomena which he tries to interpret? If it is crazy to interpret Brutus in terms of the French revolution, it is still more crazy for a historicist to talk of Greek *states*, of Greek *religion* etc., i.e. to apply categories which are not Greek to Greek phenomena. If it is true that each "culture" is unique, it has a categorical system of its own, and that system must be discovered out of the phenomena of that culture itself. We must then study the various cultures directly, and not, as Spengler largely had done, the *literature on* these cultures. We must

study the *documents*. This, however, primarily means *interpreting texts*[13], seeing that the interpretation of other documents, e.g. statues[14], is much more open to subjective interpretation than are explicit statements.

Thus Spengler gave to historical studies an infinitely greater significance than they previously had[1] had. For he had practically reduced philosophy itself to understanding of the historical phenomena. [1](Prewar historicism had acknowledged at least logic and theory of knowledge as nonhistorical disciplines.)[1] It was[15] now no longer historians, but philosophers who studied the past with no other interest than to understand the past.

γ) If philosophy is reduced for one moment to understanding texts, the philosophic interest has to be focussed on the phenomena of interpretation, generally speaking: of understanding other people's thoughts. That is to say: *hermeneutics* takes on a central significance. Study of hermeneutics, of the principles underlying understanding ≠ explaining paves the way for a philosophy as an attempt to *understand* the phenomena, as distinguished from a philosophy which attempts to *explain* the phenomena. |

2 verso δ) The turning to the texts themselves implies a profound distrust of the initial categories of interpretation, of the categories we use before having *submitted* ourselves to the [1]test of the[1] past. That distrust is directed especially against the term "culture" which is the product of the[16] Faustic soul. More elementary, less sophisticated terms are required if we want to give an accurate and adequate account of the thoughts and interests guiding the life of earlier people. [1]We must get rid of the whole conceptual apparatus created by modern philosophy or science, and indeed by the older traditions of philosophy or science; we must return to a[1] pre-philosophic or a[1] pre-scientific language if we want to arrive at an adequate understanding of pre-philosophic "culture."[1]

Whoever tried seriously to understand the past along these lines discovered certain *basic* facts and interests which have *not* changed and which are not subject to change. Therewith the historical interest turned into a philosophic interest, into the interest in the eternal nature of man. And that turn was backed by historical studies as distinguished from a general

philosophy of history. Finally, it became clear that members of all "cultures", 'being *men*,' may understand each other, whereas the "Faustic" historicist understands none, because he does not see the eternal nature of man, 'because he does not see the wood for the trees.'

Besides, familiarity with earlier thought provides[17] the experience of the *practicability* of an essentially *unhistorical* approach: radical historicism awakes a passionate interest in the past and therewith a passionate interest in the[18] unhistorical approach characteristic of man up to the 18th century.

II. Demand for evident justification of historical studies in general and of each individual historical study in particular

The assumption underlying the tendency under discussion is the view that philosophy is self-knowledge of man in his historicity. Such philosophy takes on the form of historical study. Philosophy or history thus understood is essentially and purely *theoretical*. Now, a purely theoretical approach to history is open to an objection which had been raised by Nietzsche in the '70s, in his essay "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben", but which was not appreciated very much before the war. The objection may be put this way: historical knowledge, as self-knowledge of man, as *reflection*, is dangerous to spontaneity; human life and human history are essentially spontaneous; therefore, the total victory of historical consciousness, of history *understood*, would be the end of history itself, of history *lived* or *done*. (If the philosophers of the past had been historians, there would be no history of philosophy. Or, the other way round: if we want to *understand* the philosophers of the past, we must be guided by the same basic interest which guided them: the interest in *the* truth, in the truth about the whole, and not 'the *historical* interest,' the interest in the opinions of other people). Historical consciousness ought then not to be left to itself, it ought to be limited by, and made subservient to, the forces which *make* history: historical studies ought to be in the service of *life*. Life means the *present*. Historical consciousness left to itself, historical consciousness ruling supreme, would mean the unlimited rule of the past over the present. The consequence is: we must

no longer take it for granted that historical knowledge and historical studies are useful, pleasant and necessary. For experience shows that mankind lived at almost all times without the famous historical sense ("the sixth sense"). |

3 recto Of course, we find historical interest, historiography, very early in the development of mankind. But never before the 18th century did history take on a *philosophic* significance. The view that history has such a significance – this view underlying the very term "philosophy of history" – has to be considered a *prejudice*, as long as we have not understood thoroughly why present-day life, why present-day philosophy, as distinguished from that of earlier periods, *needs* historical consciousness. And that *need*, that *necessity* has to be shown not merely in general, but, moreover, no individual historical study can be considered significant, if it is not undertaken with perfect clarity as to *its* "existential" necessity.

If radical historicism changed the character of historical studies profoundly[19], in so far as it engendered a new *passion* for historical studies, indeed an *extreme* passion for such studies, Nietzsche's criticism of historicism (and also the philosophy of existence) enlightened that passion by compelling people to make perfectly clear to themselves the *motives* of historical studies in general and of each individual historical study in particular. It was apt to direct historical studies towards the interpretation of such texts as were relevant to the solution, or understanding, of our most urgent immediate problems. And it led up to the fundamental question of the meaning of historical consciousness by raising the question why and how far historical consciousness is a necessity.

III. The reasons characteristic of our time which make historical consciousness a necessity

The question of the reason why and how far historical consciousness is a necessity, is itself a *historical* question. Nietzsche's question and answer had been unhistorical: he had explained out of human nature as such why *man* needs history. He naturally had seen that there is a basic difference between all earlier historical interest and that radical historical interest which had developed since the 18th century.[20]

He had *objected* to that radical historical interest; but he had not attempted to *understand* the *necessity* underlying it. Thus, Nietzsche's question had to be made more precise: why does *modern* man need historical studies, why is *modern* man compelled to be historically minded in a way in which no earlier age had been? Why do *we* need history?

Three answers were given to that question.

a) Human life is essentially historical, i.e., man naturally needs a *tradition* which guides him, which makes possible communication and mutual understanding. *The* tradition, the tradition based upon Greek science and Biblical religion, had been gradually undermined since the 16th century. For modern man attempted to be free from all prejudices, i.e. from all traditions. But the fact that man does need tradition is shown by this, that the very same modern man who undermined all traditions was compelled to take refuge in history: history is the modern surrogate for tradition. |

b) It is not true that modern man has no tradition; each generation necessarily grows up in a tradition, even if it grows up in a tradition of anti-traditionalism. Tradition is *always* a decisively determining *power*. That power cannot be disposed of by a decision to doubt once in one's life one's prejudices; Descartes' fate shows clearly that such a wholesale liberation from the prejudices does not work; to[21] free our minds from the shackles of tradition which prevent us from looking at things with our own eyes, in an unbiased and independent way, we must first *know* the power we are up against; we cannot get rid of the prejudices but after having *understood* them from their roots, from their *historical* roots. Now, it would be an error to assume that the destruction of tradition, attempted since Descartes, actually achieved its purpose. It could not achieve its purpose, because its attack on *tradition* was bound up with belief in actual or possible *progress*. Now, progress at its best is the establishment of a true and sound tradition, but at any rate the establishment of a new *tradition*. For "progress" means that certain questions, the *basic* questions can be settled once and for all, so that the answers to these questions can be taught to children, so that the subsequent generations simply can build up on the solutions found out by earlier generations, without bothering any longer about the basic questions. 3 verso

I.e.: "progress" implies that the answers to the basic questions can be taken for granted, that they can be permitted to become *prejudices* for all generations after that of the founding fathers. Accordingly, the process of intellectual development during the modern centuries consists in this, that each generation *reacts* to the preceding generation and to the preceding generation *only*, without raising the question whether the whole basis on which the discussion takes place – that basis discovered by the founding fathers – is valid. Hegel's view that the historical process is a sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, a sequence which necessarily brings to light the truth, is only an expression of the actual procedure of the modern centuries. That process may be sketched as follows: Descartes attacks and refutes late scholasticism, Locke refutes Descartes, Berkeley refutes Locke, Hume[III] refutes Berkeley, Kant refutes Hume, Hegel refutes Kant etc.; but the foundation laid by Descartes is never truly tested, because the root of the pre-modern position, the philosophy of Aristotle, the alleged refutation of which is the basis of modern philosophy, is never adequately discussed. For all discussions of Aristotle make use of modern conceptions, of conceptions the use of which decides beforehand the outcome of the discussion.

Robert Musil in his novel *The Man Without Qualities* expressed the criticism of the then still prevalent view by saying that the process of history, far from being guided by the exigencies of reason, actually is a process of muddling through ("Weiterwurschteln"). The outcome of a discussion depends, not on reason, but on "history," and the verdicts of history are what we believe to be established truths. To counteract that tendency, a radical revision at least of the causes célèbres, allegedly[1] decided by *history*, is indispensable. And *we* are in need of such a revision much more than the former gener-
1 recto ations, since | the anti-traditionalism characteristic of modern thought is apt to make us blind to the fact that we are the *heirs* of a *tradition* of anti-traditionalism, and since historical research shows us more and more how much we still are under the spell of the medieval *tradition* of Aristoteli[ani]sm

III His criticism of causality takes into account exclusively Hobbes, Clarke and Locke – not: Aristotle.

and Biblical *authority*. The *ballast* of tradition has *not* become *smaller* since the days of Descartes, it has become *greater*.

c) Historical studies are the most urgent necessity, if present day man does not happen to *know* of fundamental facts which were known to earlier generations, in other words, if we have *teachers* in the past and none in our time. Historical studies are necessary because of the *bankruptcy* of modern man. That bankruptcy was asserted by a large number of people – it implied a less fatalistic view of the same facts which had given birth to the title "Decline of the West." To mention one example only: Yorck von Wartenburg in his correspondence with Dilthey which was published in 1926, had said: modern man is finished and just fit to be buried; the movement which had begun in the Renaissance or earlier, has come to its close; enthusiastic pupils of Heidegger said that *Martin* Heidegger marks the end of the epoch which was opened by another Martin, Martin Luther. The feeling[22] that we were witnessing an end, that modern man was at his wit's end, was the most important motive for historical studies, for a turning to the thought of the past. "We are sold out completely as regards knowledge – we know nothing – this ignorance of ours is then, and then only, not utterly unbearable if we are willing to *learn* something; i.e. if we are willing to open the old in-folios, to *read* – but to read not with that astonishing detachment and indifference with which the preceding generations used to read those books, but with the consuming interest of him who wants to be taught, who wants to receive a teaching" (Ebbinghaus).

In a less dogmatic form, that view may be expressed as follows: it is after all *possible* that the truth, or the right approach to the truth, has been found in a remote past and *forgotten* for[23] centuries.

IV. The bankruptcy of the present: the turning from reason to authority

The bankruptcy of modern man seemed to become obvious in the crisis of modern science. The expression *Grundlagenkrisis* (crisis of the foundations of all sciences and studies) became a slogan. Of course, the existence of such a crisis was denied with

regard to the continuing progress of the natural sciences as well as of historical research. But the critics of modern science pointed to the fact that science as a whole had lost that *significance*, that *human* significance which it certainly had [had] up to the end of the 19th century and even up to the last war. The controversy over Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been of immediate concern to every thinking person; even the controversy over du Bois-Reymond's *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* had a wide echo; but the scientific discoveries of postwar time (except those of immediate bearing on technology and medicine) were important only to specialists.

The enormous loss of prestige which science, the scientific spirit, had suffered, revealed itself nowhere more clearly than in the most significant *defence*, offered in postwar Germany, of the scientific spirit: Max Weber's *Science and Learning as a Vocation*. Weber had an unusually high qualification to state the case of traditional science before the younger generation: he enjoyed a very high reputation as a scholar (he was not merely a theoretician of the social sciences, but he had enriched the social sciences themselves) as well as a teacher, and he understood the aspirations as well as the frustrations of the younger generation. During the turmoil of the year 1919, when the thinking part of the academic youth was more eager than ever before the war for genuine *knowledge*, for real *science* as regards the basic principles or ends of human actions, |
4 verso Weber declared that no science of that kind is possible, that no genuine *knowledge* of the true aims of human life can be expected of science or philosophy. To the question of what the more than technical meaning of science or scholarship or philosophy is, Weber gave this answer: the views that science etc. is the way to the true being or to nature or to God or to happiness, are "illusions" which no one but "great children" can accept any longer. Science can teach us many things as regards the *means* leading to the various ultimate ends which are possible; it can even elucidate the *meaning* of these ends or values; but it cannot settle the conflicts between the different values: which value of the various conflicting values is to be preferred, can *not* be said by science or philosophy. The conflict which cannot be settled by *argument*, must be settled by the free *decision* of every individual. This is, according to

Weber, the distinction between the man of science and the prophet: that the prophet can and must recommend on the basis of his decision what he considers to be the right aim, whereas the man of science must refrain from any such recommendation. Weber went to the end of this way by asserting that science or philosophy, far from being able to settle the fundamental question of the right life of man as man, is itself ultimately based on an "irrational" decision: the opposition to the scientific spirit, to the scientific approach as such, cannot be *refuted*[24], cannot be shown to be absurd, by *science*.

Weber's thesis amounted to this: that reason and argument are intrinsically incapable of giving to life a real guidance. Reason and argument cannot bridge the gulf which separates the different groups each of which is guided by a star, a value-system, of its own. Now, every human community needs some degree of agreement at least as regards the basic moral questions. Such an agreement may be supplied by a tradition; but in Germany, traditions were losing their force more and more. If reason and argument are incapable of supplying people with the minimum of mutual understanding required for living together,[25] if mutual understanding as regards the practical basis of common life cannot be reached by reason and argument, people had no choice but to turn away from reason to *authority*.

The most visible kind of authority – most visible at least in Germany – is the *State*. In an essay *Der Begriff des Politischen* (What is political?), Carl Schmitt indicated the following chain of thought: there is not one ideal, but a variety of conflicting ideals; therefore, ideals cannot have an obligatory character; more precisely, any value judgment is a free decision, which concerns exclusively the freely deciding individual himself; it is essentially a private affair; therefore, no one can expect of any other man that that other man sacrifice[26] anything for the first man's ideal; but no political community can exist without asserting that there are *obligations* which can overrule any private decision; whatever may be the ultimate source of these obligations, they cannot be derived from free decisions of the individual, or else they could be no more than *conditional* obligations, not *absolute* obligations, the obligation to sacrifice life itself. For, Schmitt asserts, if we analyse political

obligation, and above all the meaning of "political," we find that we mean by "political" any fact which is related to the distinction of friend and enemy of the group to which we belong, that distinction originating in the possibility of *war*. The basic fact of the possibility of war sets an absolute limit to all freedom of decision: it creates *authority* and therewith it gives all members of the community a generally valid guidance. |

5 recto A more radical expression of this view is to be found in an essay by Ernst Jünger "On pain" (in: *Blätter und Steine*). Jünger asserts that in our period all faiths and ideals of earlier times have lost their force and evidence. Consequently, all standards with reference to which we can judge ourselves and others are no longer valid. But there is one standard left: the ability or inability to stand pain, physical pain. Fortitude or courage is the only virtue which is still evident, the only virtue left – and this not without reason: ἀνδρεία is *the* original virtue.

However highly people might think of the State, the remembrance was not lost that the State can never be an *absolute* authority. An absolute authority must be superhuman, the authority of God. Since the beginning of this century, people had spoken of a religious revival after the positivistic indifference of the 19th century. That revival was always accompanied by the opinion that an unreserved return to the teaching of the Bible was impossible, because of the achievements of modern science and criticism. After the war, however, such an unreserved return to the Bible as the document of *revelation* became a serious possibility for many people. The age-old distrust of revelation and theology was replaced by a distrust of religion. A remarkable philosophic writer of predominantly theological interest was fond of the fact that the very term "religion" did not occur once in his work. The belief that the unmodified and unmitigated teaching of the Bible had been refuted by modern science and criticism, lost its power. Karl Barth in particular insisted upon the fact that what had been refuted in the 17th and 18th centuries[27] was a weak kind of apologetics, but never the doctrine of Calvin and Luther themselves.

The development under discussion may be described in the following terms: [the] theory of knowledge had raised the question of what science is. It had *not* raised the more

fundamental question of Nietzsche "*Why* science?" The question "why science" [28]seems to imply[28] that there is a standard higher than science with reference to which science as such can be judged. According to Nietzsche, that standard is "life." But life, human life, is not intrinsically superior to science, human science: the philosopher is always free to answer "pereat vita, vivat philosophia," and therewith to reject the authority of "life." The [1]evidently necessary[1] question "why science" becomes compelling[29] only with regard to something which is superior to everything human: the question "why science" calls science before the tribunal of the authority of revelation. Science is not necessary: man may choose it or reject it (this is implied in the very question "why science?"). An absolute necessity cannot be found but in divine command.

The inability of modern science or philosophy to give man an evident teaching as regards the fundamental question, the question of the right life, led people to turn from science or reason to authority, to the authority of the State or the authority of Revelation. Politics and theology, as distinguished from science of all kind[s], appeared to be much more closely connected with the basic interests of man as man than science *and all culture:* the political community and the word of the living God are basic; compared with them everything else is derived and relative. *"Culture" is superseded by politics and theology, by "political theology."* We have travelled a long road away from Spengler.

In that situation, a pupil of Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, made an attempt to save argument and reason against the doubt, expressed by his teacher, that argument and reason are incapable of leading[30] to agreement as regards the fundamentals. Mannheim believed that such an agreement could be reached on the basis of the fact that all divergent opinions worth considering are related to, or produced by, the *present situation.* Consciousness of our belonging to the same situation may lead to a solution of our most urgent problem: discussion between the various opposed groups leads to a dialectic synthesis of the divergent opinions. This suggestion, if meant as a philosophic and not merely as a political suggestion, (and there is reason for believing that it *was* meant to be a philosophic suggestion) seems to be absurd: a dialectic

synthesis of atheism and theism, e.g., cannot even be imagined. Mannheim probably would answer that theism is today
5 verso nothing[31] more than an obsolete ideology, | since it is not genuinely related to the present situation. At any rate, this *was* asserted by many people: Nietzsche's statement that the greatest event in the recent history of Europe is the death of God was explicitly or implicitly adopted by a considerable number of writers (Spengler, Scheler, Hartmann, Heidegger). According to that view, the present age is the first radically atheistic epoch in the history of mankind. Thus, reflection on the specific character of the present age leads indeed to the discovery of an ideal potentially common to all present-day men or at least Europeans. That ideal 'which is' in accordance with the characteristic assumption of our time will be an atheistic morality.

The new atheism is opposed not only to the belief in a personal God and to pantheism, but equally to the *morality* of the Bible, to the belief in progress, in human brotherhood and equality, in the dignity of man as man, in short to all moral standards which, [32]as it believed,[32] lose their meaning once they are separated from their religious basis. – Also: the new atheism does no longer believe (as the Greeks did) in the κόσμος: therefore the attitude, underlying Greek science, of admiring the κάλλιστος κοσμος is replaced by the attitude of courage and Standhalten. – Moreover: 19th century atheism had tried to replace God by mankind or man; it thus had deified man, who, however, is a finite being. The new atheism insists on the finiteness of men: deification of mankind is no genuine atheism.

People[33] were then confronted with an atheism, much more radical than e.g. Marxist atheism can be, on the one hand, and 'an attempt at' a restoration of the belief in Divine revelation on the other. That is to say, they[34] were confronted with a situation which had not existed in Europe for[35] many generations. Naturally, their[36] conceptual instruments (if I may say so) were utterly insufficient to tackle the new or rather old problems. It was hard not to see that the question of the existence or non-existence of a personal God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, was a serious question, more serious even than the question of the right method of the social sciences. If

the question should be answered, if it should even be understood as a meaningful question, one had to go back to an age when it was in the center of discussion – i.e. to Pre-Kantian philosophy.

For: 1) atheism was no longer proved – it was asserted that God is dead, i.e. that people no longer believe in the Biblical God – which is clearly no proof. For the view[37] that Biblical belief had been "refuted" by modern science and criticism presupposed[38] belief in that science and criticism, a belief utterly shattered in the period in question.

2) as regards Biblical theology of Gogarten, Rosenzweig etc.: it was no longer the Biblical theology of the Bible or of Calvin and Luther – was it then a Biblical theology at all?

Return to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, or more precisely to the philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries[39], seemed to be recommended by yet another consideration. The urgency of a convincing, generally valid moral teaching, of a moral teaching of evident political relevance, was clearly felt. Such a moral teaching seemed to be discernible in the natural law doctrines of the 17th and 18th centuries[39] rather than in later teaching[s]. (Troeltsch had asserted time and again that the political superiority of the Anglosaxons was due to the fact that that natural law tradition had not been superseded, to the same extent as in Germany, by historicism.) For the natural law teachers of the 17th and 18th centuries had spoken of laws and obligations, and not merely of ideals and values. |

V. The return to reason and the final liberation from historicism

6 recto

The tendencies just mentioned imply, as you doubtless have noticed, a *reaction* to the defeatism which had led to the turning from reason to authority. But that reaction, that return to sanity, was *not* a return to 19th century or 20th century positivism or neo-Kantianism. That positivism and neo-Kantianism was inseparable from the belief in progress and therewith from a philosophy of history. It was as inseparable from a

philosophy of history as was its opponent (authoritarianism and historicism). But the rationalism posterior to historicism returned from Turgot and his pupils to Montesquieu or the 17th century philosophers. For that new rationalism was engaged in the quest for *eternal* truths and *eternal* standards, and it clearly realized that eternal truths and eternal standards are indifferent in themselves to any theory as to the sequence in which they are discovered or put into practice. "History" became again the realm of *chance;* i.e. "history" ceased to be a realm of its own, a field in the way in which nature is said to be a field. Historicism was about to be overcome definitely.

Let me explain this somewhat more fully. The view that truth is eternal and that there are eternal standards, was contradicted by historical consciousness, i.e. by the opinion that all "truths" and standards are necessarily relative to a given historical situation, and that, consequently, a mature philosophy can raise no higher claim than that to express the spirit of the period to which it belongs. Now, historical consciousness is not a revelation; it claims to be *demonstrably* superior to the unhistorical earlier view. But what does the historicist really *prove*? In the best case, that all attempts hitherto made by man to discover *the* truth about the universe, about God, about the right aim of human life, have not led to a generally accepted doctrine. Which is clearly not a proof that the question of *the* truth about the universe, about God, about the right aim of human life is a meaningless question. The historicist may have proved that in spite of all the efforts made by the greatest men, we do not know the truth. But what does this mean more than that[1] philosophy, quest for truth, is as necessary as ever? What else does it mean but that no man, and still less no sum of men, is wise, σοφος, but only, in the best case, φιλοσοφος? Historicism refutes all systems of philosophy – by doing this, it does the cause of philosophy the greatest service: for a system of philosophy, a system of *quest* for truth, is non-sense. In other words, historicism mistakes the unavoidable *fate* of all philosophers who, being men, are apt to err[10], for a refutation of the *intention* of philosophy. Historicism is in the best case a proof of our *ignorance* – of which we are aware without historicism – but by not deriving from the insight into our ignorance the urge

to seek for knowledge, it betrays a lamentable or ridiculous self-complacency; it shows that it is just one dogmatism among the many dogmatisms which it may have debunked. |

Philosophy in the original meaning of the word presupposes the liberation from historicism. I say, the *liberation* from it, and not merely its[41] refutation. Refutations are cheap and usually not worth the paper on which they are written; for they do not require that the refuting writer has *understood* the ultimate motives of the adversary. The liberation from historicism requires that historical consciousness be[42] seen to be, not a self-evident premise, but a *problem*. And it necessarily is a *historical* problem. For historical consciousness is an opinion, or a set of opinions, which occurs only in a certain period. Historical consciousness is, to use the language of that consciousness, itself a *historical* phenomenon, a phenomenon which has come into being and which, therefore, is bound to pass away again. Historical consciousness will be superseded by something else. 6 verso

The historicist would answer: the only thing by which historical consciousness can be superseded is the new barbarism. As if historicism had not paved the way to that new barbarism. Historical consciousness is not such an impressive thing that something superior to it should be inconceivable.

What was[43] required was[43] that *history should be applied to itself*. Historical consciousness is itself the product of a historical process, of a process which is barely known and certainly never adequately, i.e. critically studied. I.e.: historical consciousness is the product of a *blind* process. We certainly ought not to accept the result of a blind process on trust. By bringing that process to light, we free ourselves from the power of its result. We become again, what we cannot be before, *natural* philosophers, i.e. philosophers who approach the natural, the basic and original question of philosophy in a natural, an adequate way.

VI. Return to reason as a return to Plato and Aristotle

A return to reason *which implies or presupposes a critical analysis of the genesis of historical consciousness*, necessarily is a return to reason as reason was understood in pre-modern times.

For it would be a mistake to think that historical consciousness is a product of romanticism only. Romantic historical consciousness is only a correction of the historical consciousness of Enlightenment (criticism of the present vs. satisfaction with the present and its potentialities). At the very beginning of the modern period, in the 16th century, we observe for the first time the turning of *philosophers* to history as history (≠ facts recorded by historians). But when *studying* the genesis of historical consciousness, we *judge* it, we look at it with critical eyes: we [14]are in[14] the first steps and the imperfect beginnings of something wonderful, but the first step away from the right approach: for we know from experience the ultimate result[15] to which that first step led. I.e., when studying the genesis of historical consciousness, we look at it with the eyes of pre-modern philosophy – we stand on the other side of the fence. Only by doing this, shall we be enabled to find the *right* name of that which *we* call history (Geschichte ≠ Historie).

Why has such a return become a necessity? In attempting to answer that question, I shall have to summarize a number of remarks which I made before in different connections. |

7 recto Modern philosophy has come into being as a *refutation* of traditional philosophy, i.e. of the Aristotelian philosophy. Have the founders of modern philosophy *really* refuted Aristotle ? Have they ever *understood* him[16]? They certainly understood the Aristotelians of their time, but they certainly did not understand Aristotle himself. But it might be said that the refutation not adequately done by the founding fathers, has been done in the meantime. By whom? He cannot have been *refuted*, if he has not been *understood*: And this was perhaps the most profound impression which the younger generation experienced in Germany during the period in question: under the guidance of Heidegger, people came to see that Aristotle and Plato had *not* been understood. Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle was an achievement with which I cannot compare any other[17] intellectual phenomenon which has emerged in Germany after the war. Heidegger made it clear, not by assertions, but by concrete analyses – the work of an enormous concentration and diligence – that Plato and Aristotle have *not* been understood by the modern philosophers; for they

read their own opinions into the works of Plato and Aristotle; they did not read them with the necessary zeal to know what Plato and Aristotle really meant, which *phenomena* Plato and Aristotle had in mind when talking of whatever they were talking [about]. And as regards the classical scholars, their[48] interpretations too[1] are utterly dependent on modern philosophy, since the way in which they *translate*, i.e. *understand*, the terms of Plato and Aristotle is determined by the influence on their mind of modern philosophy. For even a classical scholar is a modern man, and therefore under the spell of modern biases: and an adequate understanding of a pre-modern text requires, not merely knowledge of language and antiquities and the secrets of criticism, but also a constant *reflection* on the specifically modern assumptions which might[1] prevent us from understanding pre-modern thought, if we are not constantly on our guard. If Plato and Aristotle are not understood and consequently not refuted, return to Plato and Aristotle is an open possibility.

That possibility exercised a certain appeal on all people who had become dissatisfied with modern philosophy. For a return to scholasticism was not so much considered in Germany as it was in France. And this [was so] not only because Germany is predominantly Protestant, but also because the *derived* nature of scholasticism as compared with the *original* philosophy of Plato and Aristotle was too keenly felt.

Heidegger was not the only man who drew the attention of the younger generation to Greek antiquity as *the* truly classical period. Werner Jaeger's activity had a similar effect. I think it was in the environment of Jaeger that the term "third humanism" was coined. "Third humanism" would be a movement which continues in a most radical way the second humanism, the humanism of the German classics, of Schiller, e.g., who in his essay *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* had described the relation of the moderns to the ancients in these terms: the Greeks *were* nature, whereas for modern man, nature, being natural, is only an ought, an *ideal*; modern man[49] has a *longing* for what was *real* in Greece.

The discussion concerning science, concerning the specific features of the scientific approach, had led to [50]a point[50] where this general impression of what the Greeks were could

take on a more definite meaning. It had been an implication of phenomenology to distinguish between the *scientific* view of [the] world (the view, elaborated by *modern* science) and the *natural* view of the world, the idea being that that natural view is prior to, and the[1] basis of, the scientific view: the scientific
7 verso view of the world | emerges out of the natural view by virtue of a specific modification of approach. Now it became clear that that basic view, the starting point of the view elaborated by modern[1] science, more precisely: that the world as it is present for, and experienced by, that natural view, had been the subject of Plato's and Aristotle's analyses. Plato and Aristotle appeared to have discussed adequately what had *not* been discussed by the founders of modern philosophy, nor by their successors. For Hegel had indeed attempted to understand "the concrete," the phenomena themselves, but he had tried to "*construct*" them by starting from the "abstract." Whereas this was precisely the meaning of the Socratic turning: that science must *start* from the known, from the "known *to us*," from what is known in ordinary experience, and that science *consists* in *understanding* what is known indeed, but not understood adequately. (E.g. to deny motion, is "madness," for δῆλον ἐξ ἐπαγωγῆς; but τί ἔστι κίνησις – *that* is the question). Platonic and Aristotelian terms appeared to have a directness, and they appeared to have that direct relation to "impressions" which Hume had demanded and which he could not find, indeed, in the *modern* concept of cause and effect to which he limited his discussions – a directness, I say, absent from the modern concepts which all presuppose that *break*, effected by Descartes and continued by all his successors, with natural knowledge.[IV] Therefore, if we want to arrive at an adequate understanding

IV Cf., e.g. Hegel: "Im allgemeinen ist zu bemerken, dass das Denken sich auf den Standpunkt des Spinozismus gestellt haben muss; das ist der wesentliche Anfang alles Philosophierens. Wenn man anfängt zu philosophieren, so muss man zuerst Spinozist sein. Die Seele muss sich baden in diesem Äther der einen Substanz, in der alles, was man für wahr gehalten hat, untergegangen ist." ["In general it should be noted that thinking had to take the standpoint of Spinozism; that is the essential beginning of all philosophizing. If one begins to philosophize, then one has to be a Spinozist first. The soul has to bathe in the ether of the one substance in which everything that one has held to be true has perished."]

of the "natural" world, we simply have to *learn* from Plato and Aristotle.

But however this may be, whatever may be the final result of our studying Plato and Aristotle, whether or how far we can adhere ultimately to their analyses in all respects or not – what is decisively important is that we first learn to grasp their intention and then that their results be *discussed.* La querelle des anciens et des modernes must be renewed – it must be repeated with much greater fairness and greater *knowledge* than it was done in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle, which is not more than a beginning, would not have been possible without *Husserl's* phenomenology. As regards Husserl's work, I can only say that I believe that it surpasses in significance everything I know of, which was done in Germany in the last 50 years. Such an analysis as that of the transformation of geometry underlying Galileo's physics, as we find it in one of his latest publications, is the model for any analysis[51] concerning the basic assumptions of modern science and philosophy. |

But Husserl was not the only superior mind who was respon- 8 recto
sible for the great change we have been witnessing. At least as influential in this respect was the work of *Nietzsche.* Nietzsche changed the intellectual climate of Germany and perhaps of the whole continental Europe in a way similar to that in which Rousseau had changed that climate about 120 years before. And I do not think that a comparable change of the intellectual climate had occurred in the time between Nietzsche and Rousseau. The work of Nietzsche is as ambiguous as was that of Rousseau. And there is therefore a quite understandable difference of opinion as to what the real meaning of Nietzsche's work is. If I understand him correctly, his deepest concern was with philosophy, and not with politics ("philosophy and State are incompatible"); and that philosophy, in order to be really philosophy, and not some sort of dogmatism, is the sake of *natural* men,[52] of men capable and willing to live "under the sky," of men who do not need the shelter of the cave, of *any* cave. Such a cave, such an artificial[53] protection against the *elementary* problems, he descried, not only in

the pre-modern tradition (of providence), but likewise in the modern tradition. It was against "history," against the belief that "history" can decide any question, that progress can ever make superfluous the discussion of the primary questions, against the belief that history, that indeed any human things, are the elementary subject of philosophy, that he reasserted hypothetically the doctrine of eternal return: to drive home that the elementary, the natural subject of philosophy still is, and always will be, as it had been for the Greeks: the κόσμος, the world.

Text-Critical Notes

[ ] contains additions by the editor.
<> indicates deletions by Leo Strauss.

1. Inserted or added by Leo Strauss between the lines or in the margins.
2. Ms.: than is Western philosophy.
3. [Insertion in ink in the margin. LS first wrote *an acute remembrance.* Then he made the correction in pencil: *recollection.*]
4. the most < petty-bourgeois and > ridiculous
5. < that >
6. < western >
7. < attacked >
8. < preceded >
9. < was >
10. < its >
11. cultures < and their >
12. Ms.: seen soon
13. < the > *texts*
14. Ms.: statues e.g.
15. Ms.: were
16. < a specifically >
17. Ms.: provides with
18. < that >
19. < radically >
20. [Noted in the margin in pencil:] But see Nietzsche, 2nd Unzeitgemässe, p. 61.
21. < to prev >
22. < fact >
23. Ms.: since
24. *refuted* < by science >
25. together, < people had no choice but to *turn away from reason to authority.* >

26. Ms.: sacrifices
27. Ms.: century
28. < implied >
29. compelling < and meaningful >
30. Ms.: incapable to lead
31. < no >
32. < allegedly >
33. < We >
34. < we >
35. Ms.: since
36. < our >
37. < fact >
38. < implied >
39. Ms.: century
40. < be mistaken >
41. < the >
42. Ms.: is
43. < is >
44. < observe >
45. < reason >
46. < that >
47. other < impression >
48. Ms.: they
49. Ms.: modern modern has
50. < a position >
51. < studies >
52. [The English formulation *is the sake of natural men* is explained and is to be understood as a rendering of the German expression *ist die Sache natürlicher Menschen,* is the task or subject matter of natural men.]
53. artificial < , if for all practical purposes necessary, >